

Strategies for Managing Campus-Related Stress Among Students of the University of Education, Winneba

Alfred Alunga Anovunga Joseph Akpadago

Department of Education, St. John Bosco's College of Education, Navrongo, P. O. Box 11, Navrongo, Ghana

Abstract

The study was on stress and stress management among students of the University of Education, Winneba at the Winneba Campus. The objective of the study was identify the common stressors that affected the academic performance of students and to further determine the strategies students adopt in managing stress during stressful situations on campus. The survey method was used for the study and a sample size of 500 students was used for the study. A questionnaire was designed for the study. Frequency counts and percentages were used in the analysis of data collected. High cost of food staffs, lack of accommodation on campus, too many assignments and quizzes as well as uncondusive lecture halls were some of the causes of stress among of the University of Education, Winneba. It was discovered that students resort to watching television, resting in bed, visiting friends and drinking alcohol as a way of managing stress. It was recommended among others that orientation programmes and symposiums on how to manage stress be organized for freshers and continuing students to reduce the stressful situations that they faced in the course their studies.

Keywords; Chronic, Depression, Anxiety, Psychological, and Physical threats

1. Introduction

University education comes with its own demands, changes, challenges and pressure on the individuals who wish to acquire it. These demands start right from the first day it occurred in your mind to acquire university education in any of the tertiary institutions in the country.

All the processes involve in acquiring this education can amount to the dreaded situation called “stress” due to some changes and challenges like financial problems, choice and knowledge of courses to read, separation from one’s family, accommodation problems, how to manage time, how to cope with lectures, examination phobia, to mention but few. The researcher took into consideration all the above challenges in the University of Education, Winneba as students struggle to pursue various courses in the Winneba campus.

According to Vermunt and Steensman (2005), stress is the perception of discrepancy between environmental demands (stressors) and individual capacity to fulfill these demands. Campbell (2006) defined stress as the adverse reaction people have to go through excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them. Stress occurs when an individual is confronted by a situation that he/she perceives as overwhelming and cannot cope with it. Academic stress among students have long been researched into and have identified so many assignments, competition with other students, failures, lack of pocket money, poor relationships with other students or lecturers, family problems and many more as stressors. (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to events that upset our personal balance in some way when we are faced with a threat whether to our physical safety or emotional equilibrium, the body’s defense kick into a raped process known as fight-or-flight response.

Stress response feels like heart pounding in the chest, muscles tensing up, breath coming fast and every sense on red alert. In stressful situations, the heart rate and blood flow in the large muscles increase to enable us run faster and fight harder. Blood vessels under the skin constrict to prevent blood loss in case of injury. At the same time, body processes that are not essential to immediate survival is suppressed. The digestive and reproductive systems slow down, growth hormones are switched off and the immune response is meant to protect and support us. It was what helped our stone age ancestors to survive the life-or-dead situations they commonly faced. But today, most of the stressful situations we face are in response to psychological rather than physical threats. For instance, caring for a chronically sick person or getting audited are all qualified as stressful situation but neither calls for either fight or flight. Unfortunately, our bodies do not make this distinctions. Whether we are stressed over deadline for submission of assignment or preparing to write a quiz at the same time, are all stressful.

A lot of responsibilities and worries come with stressful situations all the time. The problem with stress response is that, the more is it activated, the harder it is to cool/shut off. Instead of leveling off once the stressful crises has passed, your stress hormones, heart rate, and blood pressure remains elevated. Moreover, prolonged activation of the stress response takes a heavy toll on the body. Repeated exposure to stress increases your risk of everything from heart disease, obesity, infections, anxiety, depression and memory problems.

Stress has its negative effects on people who go through it in various ways. For instance, acute stress (sudden or short-term) leads to rapid changes throughout the body system which can feather lead to fainting, death or create physical and psychological problems to the individual. Chronic (long-term) stress in the same

way can have real health consequences and must be handled with care like any other health problem. It is very important to learn how to deal with stress in a more positive way in order to reduce its impact on our daily lives.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Students at the Winneba campus of the University of Education, Winneba have complained of going through stressful situations which create a lot of problems among them. They go through stressful situations to attend lectures, the high cost of living on campus, accommodation problems and other personal problems. According to Christopher (2010), stress can lead to panic, depression, anxiety disorder as well as mood disorder and can negatively impact one's personality. According to him, statistics have estimated 121 million people worldwide who currently suffer from depression. (World Health Organization, 2010). The above statistics and characteristics of people who go through stress is common with students in the University of Education, Winneba which has contributed to poor academic performance, referral of courses, frequent death cases among students, health problems and even withdrawal of students from the University. Most of these students come to the University with the ultimate goal of obtaining a distinction, first or second classes. Unfortunately, this is not the situation because of the stressful situations they came to meet on campus. A lot of these students only manage and struggle to complete their courses with just a third class or pass.

It was in the light of this that the researcher attempted to identify what the stressors were in order to expose them to students on campus and how they can effectively manage stress in the pursue the their University education. The objectives of the study were therefore to identify the common stressors among students of the University of Education, Winneba as well as determine stress management strategies used by these students.

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are the common stressors among students of the University of Education at the Winneba Campus?

Research Question 2: What are the various stress management strategies adopted by students of the University of Education at the Winneba Campus?

1.1.1 Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that this study will go a long way to educate students on how to manage stress while pursuing their studies on campus. It is expected that the findings of the study will educate people who wish to be admitted into the University about stress management. It is the hope of the researcher that, this piece of work would be of great importance to a large number of organizations who are concerned with the welfare of students pursuing tertiary education in the various Universities in the country. This study will also serve as a guide for other campus-based organizations like the Students Representative Council (SRC) and teachers who handle students as well as individuals who might be going through stress.

1.1.2 Methodology

The nature of the research work necessitates the use of quantitative research approach which suites the survey design for a proper examination of the situation. Quantitative research approach uses objective measurement and statistical analysis of numeric data to understand and explain a phenomenon. Kumekpor (1999) observed that when the term survey is applied to a social phenomenon, it implies a careful scrutiny or investigation of a demarcated geographical area in order to have comprehensive view of the nature, conditions and composition of the social group, institutions or process within such a defined area. Since the study was geared towards finding out the common stresses among students and how they manage those stresses, the survey design was appropriate for the work.

The population was all students pursuing various programmes of study in the various Departments of the University of Education, Winneba. The total enrollment of students during the 2010/2011 academic year within which the research was conducted was 8,561 students.

The sample of the study was made up of 500 students who were randomly selected from the department of Art Education, Music Education, Psychology and Education, Special Education, Languages, Mathematics Education, Social studies, Social science, Health physical Education recreation and sports and the department of Early childhood Education of the University of Education, Winneba. With the sampling procedure, balloting was used to select ten departments out of the 21 department of the University. The names of the department were written on pieces of papers and randomly picked by a woman who had no any idea about the research work and the eyes were closed. This was to ensure that there was no bias in the selection of departments.

The researcher further employed the purposive sampling technique to select 50 students (both male and female) from the ten selected departments based on the enrolment of male and female students in each department. The selected departments and the number of respondents are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: A table showing the sample size based on departments and gender of respondents

No.	DEPARTMENT	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	Department of Art Education	30	20	50
2	Department of Psychology and Education	35	15	50
3	Department of Music Education	20	30	50
4	Department of Special Education	40	10	50
5	Department of Languages	25	25	50
6	Department of Mathematics Education	15	35	50
7	Department of Social Studies	29	21	50
8	Department of Social Science	40	10	50
9	Department of Health Physical Education Recreation and Sports	25	25	50
10	Department of Early Childhood Education	20	30	50
Total				500

The instrument used for this research work was questionnaire. The main reason why the researcher used questionnaire was that it provides a quick and accurate way of collecting data from the respondents since they were all literates. Not only that, but questionnaire provides information or collection of data in relatively short period of time. It also has the ability to elicit more truthful responses. To ensure the validity of this study therefore, the research instrument was subjected to serious scrutiny by professors in the department of Psychology and Education.

For the researcher to be sure of the reliability of the results from the questionnaire responses, the test - retest method was used among a sample of students in the Department of theater Art Education. Thus, the questionnaire was administered to the students and the results were recorded. Then three weeks later the same questionnaire was administered to the same group of students and the results were recorded again. The reliability was determined using the Cronbach coefficient Alpha. The coefficient Alpha obtained for the study was 0.513.

The researcher used two days in each department for data collection. In each department, the questionnaire was distributed to 50 students to respond and collected within two days after they had finished filling them. The selected respondents were briefed on the purpose of the research study and encouraged to give genuine response. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Out of the 500 copies of questionnaire that were distributed, 409 copies were retrieved giving a return rate of 81.8%. Thus, 241(48.2%) from male respondents and 168(33.6%) from female respondents.

1.1.3 Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the common stressors among students of the University of Education at the Winneba Campus?

The study sought the perception of respondents on some common stressors among students of the University of Education at the Winneba Campus. Their responses presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents' perception of some common stressors among students of University of Education, Winneba

Items	male				Female			
	SA	A	D	SD	SA	A	D	SD
I get tensed up every time I am in class due to the uncondisive lecture halls and sitting arrangement	107 (44.3%)	77 (31.9%)	25 (10.3%)	12 (4.9%)	98 (58.3%)	51 (30.3%)	10 (5.9%)	9 (5.3%)
I cannot afford 'T' & 'T' to travel from one lecture hall to another in the various campuses of the University.	81 (49.3%)	27 (33.6%)	119 (11.2%)	15 (6.2%)	109 (64.8%)	53 (31.5%)	4 (2.3%)	2 (1.1%)
Some lecturers are too fast during lectures so I do not get correct points to revise for quiz and exam.	85 (35.2%)	120 (49.7%)	10 (4.1%)	26 (10.7%)	115 (68.4%)	40 (23.8%)	10 (5.9%)	3 (1.7%)
I am so much worried because my calculated GPA is very low.	99 (41.0%)	101 (41.9%)	20 (8.2%)	21 (8.7%)	111 (66.0%)	40 (23.8%)	11 (6.5%)	6 (3.5%)
I am very comfortable with all lectures within a day.	14 (5.8%)	38 (15.7%)	96 (39.8%)	93 (38.5%)	18 (10.7%)	29 (17.2%)	50 (29.7%)	51 (30.3%)
The high cost of food items on campus make me very worried anytime I have to buy food.	206 (85.4%)	12 (4.9%)	10 (4.1%)	13 (5.3%)	84 (50%)	31 (18.4%)	21 (12.5%)	10 (5.9%)

Key: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree, SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, D-Disagree and SD-Strongly Disagree

Among the common stressors identified by the respondents as unconducive lecture halls and poor sitting arrangement, 107 male respondents representing 44.3% strongly agreed, 77 representing 31.9% agreed, 25 representing 10.3% disagreed with only 12 representing 4.9% strongly disagreed and 98 female respondents representing 58.3% strongly agreed, 51 representing 30.3% agreed, 10 representing 5.9% disagreed with only 9 representing 5.3% strongly disagreed. The inability to afford 'T' & 'T' to travel from one lecture hall to another in the various campuses of the University to which 119 male respondents across the selected departments representing 49.3% strongly agreed, 81 representing 33.6% agreed, 27 representing 11.2% disagreed, 15 representing 6.2% strongly disagreed and 109 female respondents representing 64.8% strongly agreed, 53 representing 31.5% agreed, 4 representing 2.3% disagreed with only 2 representing 1.1% strongly disagreed. The fast manner of lecture delivery by some lecturers to which 85 male respondents representing 35.2% strongly agreed, 120 representing 49.7% agreed, 10 representing 4.1% disagreed with 26 representing 10.7% strongly disagreed and 115 female respondents representing 68.4% strongly agreed, 40 representing 23.8% agreed, 10 representing 5.9% disagreed with 3 representing 1.7% strongly disagreed. With low GPA, 99 male respondents representing 41% strongly agreed, 101 representing 41.9% agreed, 20 representing 8.2% disagreed, 21 representing 8.7% strongly disagreed and 111 female respondents representing 66% strongly agreed, 40 representing 23.8% agreed, 11 representing 6.5% disagreed, 6 representing 3.5% strongly disagreed. On the part of high cost of food items on campus, 206 male respondents representing 85.4% strongly agreed, 12 representing 4.9% agreed, 10 representing 4.1% disagreed, 13 representing 5.3% strongly disagreed and 84 female respondents representing 50% strongly agreed, 31 representing 18.4% agreed, 21 representing 12.5% disagreed with 10 representing 5.9% strongly disagreed.

From the analysis of the data presented in Table 2, this research study clearly established that there were common stressors among students of the University of Education, Winneba. This was justified by 107 male respondents representing 44.3% and 98 female respondents representing 58.3% who strongly agreed that the unconducive lecture halls and sitting arrangement, inability to afford 'T' & 'T' to travel from one lecture hall to another in the various campuses of the University have caused students on the Winneba campus of the University of Education, Winneba to be under chronic stress while pursuing their various courses on campus. This finding can be supported by the findings of Campbell (2006), which states that if stress becomes chronic, sufferers often experience loss of concentration at work, home, school and they may become insufficient and accident – prone. Campbell continued by saying that, chronic stress in older people may play even more important role in memory loss than the aging process. Hence, it is clear from the finding that students perform poorly in their academic work under stressful conditions on campus.

Research Question 2: What are the various stress management strategies adopted by students of the University of Education at the Winneba Campus?

The study sought to determine the coping strategies adopted by students of the University of Education, Winneba during stressful situations on campus. Their responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: respondents' coping strategies adopted during stressful situations on campus

Items	male				Female			
	SA	A	D	SD	SA	A	D	SD
I often use drugs before I can relax or sleep well.	110 (45.6%)	70 (29.0%)	34 (14.1%)	27 (11.2%)	29 (17.2%)	38 (22.6%)	51 (30.3%)	50 (29.7%)
I watch television to ease tension.	107 (44.3%)	98 (40.6%)	29 (12.0%)	7 (2.9%)	99 (58.9%)	42 (25.0%)	5 (2.9%)	2 (1.1%)
I visit friends to ease tension.	139 (57.6%)	91 (37.7%)	8 (3.3%)	3 (1.2%)	102 (60.7%)	31 (18.4%)	15 (8.9%)	20 (11.9%)
I join groups to study in order to ease tension.	210 (87.1%)	28 (11.6%)	2 (0.8%)	1 (0.4%)	98 (58.3%)	62 (36.9%)	6 (3.5%)	2 (1.1%)
When I am tensed I take alcohol to reduce tension.	121 (50.2%)	68 (28.2%)	20 (8.2%)	32 (13.2%)	23 (13.6%)	41 (24.4%)	79 (47.0%)	25 (14.8%)
I join religious groups to reduce tension.	91 (54.1%)	84 (34.8%)	50 (20.7%)	16 (6.6%)	80 (47.6%)	45 (26.7%)	21 (12.5%)	22 (13.0%)
When I am under pressure I copy assignment from friends	78 (32.3%)	117 (48.5%)	30 (12.4%)	16 (6.6%)	92 (54.7%)	34 (20.2%)	19 (11.3%)	4 (2.3%)
I smoke to get my mind off the worries anytime I am tensed up.	27 (11.2%)	12 (4.9%)	91 (37.7%)	11 (4.5%)	13 (7.7%)	29 (17.2%)	81 (48.2%)	45 (26.7%)
I exercise to ease tension anytime I am depressed	125 (51.8%)	95 (39.4%)	19 (7.8%)	2 (0.8%)	76 (45.2%)	61 (36.3%)	20 (11.9%)	11 (6.5%)

Key: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree, SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, D-Disagree and SD-Strongly Disagree

One of the coping strategies that was identified was the use of drugs in order to relax or sleep well. With this, 110 male respondents representing 45.6% strongly agreed, 70 representing 29% agreed, 34 representing 14.1% disagreed, 27 representing 11.2% strongly disagreed and 29 female respondents representing 17.2% strongly agreed, 38 representing 22.6% agreed, 51 representing 30.3% disagreed, 50 representing 29.7% strongly disagreed. Another way that was indicated was to watch television to ease tension in which 107 male respondents representing 44.3% strongly agreed, 98 representing 40.6% agreed, 29 representing 12% disagreed, 7 representing 2.9% strongly disagreed and 99 female respondents representing 58.9% strongly agreed, 42 representing 25% agreed, 5 representing 2.9% disagreed with only 2 representing 1.1% strongly disagreed. Visiting friends to ease tension was also indicated in which 139 male respondents representing 57.6% strongly agreed, 91 representing 37.7% agreed, 8 representing 3.3% disagreed, 3 representing 1.2% strongly disagreed and 102 female respondents representing 60.7% strongly agreed, 31 representing 18.4% agreed, 15 representing 8.9% disagreed, 20 representing 11.9% strongly disagreed. Exercising to ease tension was another way students used to manage stress in which 125 male respondents representing 51.8% strongly agreed, 95 representing 39.4% agreed, 19 representing 7.8% disagreed, 2 representing 0.8% disagreed and 76 female respondents representing 45.2% strongly agreed, 61 representing 36.3% agreed, 20 representing 11.9% disagreed with 11 representing 6.5% strongly disagreed.

As observed in Table 3, students adapted their own ways of managing stress some of which were very dangerous to their health. For instance, 121 male respondents representing 50.2% and 23 female respondents representing 13.6% said they resorted to drugs and alcohol in order to ease tension which can be very distractive to the body. Based on this, Davison (1996) states that stress management involves understanding the psychology

behind or that is causing the stress and finding strategies to deal with, reduce, or eliminate the stress. Haven said this, exercising to ease tension as indicated by 125 male respondents representing 51.8% and 76 female respondents representing 45.2% in table 3, is one of the best ways to manage stress. As stress management is purely individual motivation, the success of controlling one's stress will be determined through this willingness to recognize the stressors as well as its intrinsic motivation and determination to overcome the effects from stressors (Gradwell & Green 1996). Green, M. et al (1996) have concluded that stress management techniques must accredit to individual lifestyle and beliefs. By maintaining a healthy lifestyle, stress levels at chronic or acute level will gradually decrease.

According to the findings, it is shown that stress had not only had negative impact on students' academic achievement, rather, it has caused some psychological problems as shown by the terrible discovery. Few students were purposely forfeiting some lectures in the name of resting or reducing stress. Few students resorted to the use of alcohol as the remedy to easing stress while there were those who said they joined any group and did anything to obtain good mark.

1.1.4 Conclusion

As indicated in research question one of the study, the research indeed revealed that the existence of stress among students of UEW was really a causative factor for students' poor academic performance. Some of the stressors (causes of stress) such as high cost of food items and utility bills, too many quizzes and assignment, inadequate accommodation facilities on campus, academic pressure, among others were identified as the common stressors that students went through on campus.

It was discovered that students resorted to watching television, resting in bed, visiting friends and drinking alcohol as a way of managing stressful situations on campus.

The study revealed that students wished to see counselors being assigned to every department in the University where they could be assisted on the various ways of managing stress. Almost every student who responded to the questionnaire suggested that more halls of residence be built to reduce the problem of non-residence.

References

- Cambell, F. (2006). Stress differences among senior secondary school adolescent. *Journal of research and Development in Education*, 70(3):81-90.
- Davison, G. C., & Neale, J. M. (2001). *Abnormal psychology* (8th ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fairbrother, K. & Warn, J. (2003). Workplace dimensions, stress and job satisfaction. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 18(1): 8 – 12.
- Green, R. G., Muir, H., James, M., Gradwell, D., & Green, R. L. (1996). *Human factors for pilots* (2nd Ed).United Kindom: Ashgate Press.
- Kumekpor, (1999). *Understanding statistics in behavioural sciences*, USA: West Pub. Co
- Vermunt, R. & Steensman, H. (2005). How can Justice be used to Manage Stress in Organizations? *Handbook of organizational justice*, 388 – 410. Mawah: Erlbaum.